

Press release For issue 27 October 2010

Putting the heart back into Pontypool

Pontypool town centre is to receive a much needed boost of £849,500, the Heritage Lottery Fund announced today (27 October 2010) to fund a vital regeneration scheme.

The investment is part of HLF's Townscape Heritage Initiative* (THI) and will enable Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) to improve the built heritage within the town's retail and commercial centre, which has suffered from social and economic decline with the loss of major local employers and trade.

As well as the physical restoration of the buildings, local people will also benefit from opportunities to learn about their local heritage and gain new skills through community training initiatives.

With a rich industrial past, Pontypool thrived around the estate of the Hanbury family, who bought land in Pontypool at the end of the 16th century to establish an ironworks. A town of natural beauty, it was once one of the most industrially important towns in the whole of Europe.

Dan Clayton Jones, Chairman of the HLF's Committee for Wales says: "The Heritage Lottery Fund is proud to be playing a key role in helping to revitalise this once thriving Welsh town. We have invested in this scheme to support the Council's bid to transform the town, making essential improvements and repairs that will encourage local businesses and visitors back and in doing so attract further investment.

"We are positive this scheme will help make Pontypool a vibrant town once again and a place where people enjoy living and working, and can feel more confident about the future."

The scheme plans to repair and restore 26 key properties within the Pontypool Town Centre Conservation Area, which runs alongside the historic Pontypool Park. The aim is to put vacant floor space back into use and create an attractive destination for shopping and leisure for the benefit of local people whilst attracting new investors and visitors.

A tailored training scheme will also be put in place offering skills workshops in traditional building techniques such as sign writing, carpentry and masonry to help fill the specialist skills shortage and ensure long term maintenance of the built heritage.

Local property owner and Pontypool resident, Franc Marino, said: "This is great news for local businesses and the community. Having seen the difference previous restoration work has made I know this initiative will have a big impact on the area. Putting the character back into the town centre will give local people a lift and help bring visitors in.

"I'm confident it will attract more business to the area and I'd encourage local businesses to get involved in the scheme. In the current tough economic climate a lot of property owners like me would struggle to carry out restoration work but with the aid of lottery funding it is now possible."



Jacqui Bancroft, co-owner of Hair 68, based within the conservation area, commented: "It will be great to have the town looking its best and will create a great focal point for the area. If one business gets involved others will follow so this initiative really is the kick start the area needs.

"The town has a lot to offer but we need more people to use the shops here. Having brought up my family in Pontypool I want my children to be positive about their hometown and this scheme will help make it a better place for them to live."

A community project to create art hoardings for use whilst building work is taking place, will give local people the opportunity to capture the past, the present and future aspirations for Pontypool. Other community initiatives will include a digital film project and the creation of a Pontypool Town Heritage Trail, as well as a 'Pontypool Heritage Open House' event in September each year.

Councillor Bob Wellington, leader of Torfaen County Borough Council, said: "This is fantastic news that will be welcomed by Pontypool traders, shoppers and residents.

"This investment will allow us to take a huge step forward in our journey to regenerate Pontypool town centre.

"As a council we are committed to improving the town centre and I would like to congratulate our team of dedicated officers who prepared the successful bid for Heritage Lottery Funding.

Lynne Neagle, AM for Torfaen, said: "I'm absolutely delighted that Pontypool is set to benefit from this much needed funding boost - it's really great news.

"This will bring investment, jobs and tourism to the area, and I'm particularly pleased that so many of Pontypool's wonderful historic buildings are set to benefit from restoration.

"I'm really looking forward to walking the brand new Heritage Trail once the work is complete!"

HLF has invested in 64 projects or schemes in the area of Torfaen, including Blaenavon Forgotten Landscapes Project and Pontypool Park, amounting to £10,481,626**

Ends

For further information contact Helen Newton or Kate Sullivan on 02920 764 100 or hlf@equinoxcommunications.co.uk

* THI schemes are based on the creation of a "common fund" made up of the HLF grant and other funding, from which local partnerships manage a series of grants awarded to third parties to support the cost and conservation within individual projects. Membership of the local partnerships include local planning authorities and local communities. Grants from the common fund, which must be allocated within the first three years of the scheme and spent within five, can support the following work:

- Structural and fabric repairs of buildings in use
- External repairs and any internal conversion work required to bring vacant buildings back into use
- Restoration of architectural features
- Enhancement of the public realm

- Constructing sensitive new buildings on gap-sites
- Activities that improve understanding of the heritage and increase participation in its management
- Training in conservation skills
- Research and evaluation which will safeguard a long-term approach to conservation
- Extra costs associated with managing a scheme, including dedicated project officers/managers

**As of 31 July 2010. This makes a per capita spend of £115.25 which is £45.46 above the country average and £38.77 above the UK average.